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SUBJECT: UN HUMAN RIGHTS OFFICE CONFIRMS ITS REPRESENTATIVE IS LEAVING MEXICO

¶1. After weeks of rumors circulating about his imminent departure, Amerigo Incalcaterra, the Representative of the Office of the UN High Commission for Human Rights officially announced plans to leave Mexico. Liliana Valina, Deputy Representative at the UN High Commission told poloff May 9 that the UN Headquarters in Geneva had asked Incalcaterra to depart but she provided no information about an onward assignment or his replacement. She initially signaled some reluctance to discuss Incalcaterra's departure speaking in generalities about the "challenges" facing the Commission in carrying out its human rights mandate in Mexico. Without going into details, Valina suggested "restrictions" on his work and GOM "pressure" had contributed significantly to the UN decision to have Incalcaterra depart Mexico. He is expected to leave May 23; Valina will fill in until the office in Geneva appoints the next Representative.

¶2. Members of the NGO community assume that Incalcaterra is leaving as a result of a falling out with the GOM. Juan Artola from the International Organization for Migration (IOM), alleged to Poloff, that at the outset of his tenure Incalcaterra was urged not to speak publicly on sensitive issues such as gender-related killings in Ciudad Juarez, violence against journalists or military counter-crime operations, and that he had chafed under the restrictions. Poloff could not verify this assertion. Incalcaterra, indeed had maintained a relatively low profile here, concentrating on developing programs in women's issues and indigenous rights. Valina cited frustrations the High Commission's office has experienced working with the GOM bureaucracy to get such programs up and running, however. She indicated that the office's relationship with the government deteriorated after the high profile visit here by UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Louise Arbour in February. Arbour issued a public statement conveying concern about the military's involvement in the fight against organized crime and called for civilian courts to assume jurisdiction over acts committed by the military in the course of its law enforcement work. No doubt, Incalcaterra informed her statement.

¶3. Fermin Romero Vasquez, the Director of the Office of the General Assembly and International Organizations at Mexico's Foreign Relations Secretariat (SRE) said his office had not received official information on Incalcaterra's departure from the UN High Commission and could not provide a comment based on unofficial information.

¶4. Comment: We have no reason to question that Incalcaterra faced a certain amount of pressure in Mexico. At the same time, it does not appear the GOM has formally forced Incalcaterra to leave. A combination of frustration and personal reasons (Poloff had been told by Commission staff on several occasions that Incalcaterra had been out of the

country to attend to unspecified health concerns.) may have contributed to his decision to leave. Moreover, he had already been assigned to Mexico for three years. On the positive side, there is no evidence Mexico seeks to close the office or objects to the UNCHR identifying a replacement for Incalcaterra.

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